

SOME BAD BOYS OF BYBURY.

BY A. B. H.

BYBURY village was quite famous, in my day, for its smart boys—about a dozen of them, pretty near of an age, bright scholars, good fellows generally, and wide awake for any enterprise.

There could be stories told about their adventures, their camping-out, their fishing and boating trips, their many doings on land and water; but I was not there to see. I was not one of them.

Poor little Andy!" they called me, for I was a cripple. Perhaps it was because I could not run, nor climb, nor do anything, hardly, that I admired them the more.

Fourth of July was their great day, of course; it is the boys' day everywhere in this land of freedom. They began it by ringing a certain church bell the moment midnight struck, which was the signal for all the little cannons to blaze out. There were six churches in Byberry, and two of them had bells, which these youngsters had christened "Liberty Bell," and "Prohibition Bell." They were allowed to ring the former just as much as they pleased—and for that reason they did not care anything about it: they were forbidden to touch the other till sunrise of the Fourth—and for that reason they were determined to begin with it on the midnight before; and they always managed to do it.

Their only opposer was Captain Milliken, who had no motive in the world for the opposition, only once having said that he did not want it rung, he was bound to have his way—there are a good many such people. The boys liked the old gentlemen, but they determined not to be beaten; and when you take twelve boys against one man, you may be sure that there's mischief ahead. His only right of refusal was in the fact that he was sexton, and also owned more pews in the meeting-house than any other man. However, from year to year the townspeople said, "Let them ring! It is a better way to celebrate than to use so much powder."

On this particular Fourth, Captain Milliken made great boasts that he had got the doors and windows so securely fastened that the boys would have to give it

up. That being equal to a challenge, no boy of any spunk, and certainly no Byberry boy, *would give it up*. The evening before the Fourth there was a mysterious gathering in an unoccupied house near by; and to this rendezvous one of the big boys, Tom Milliken, the Captain's nephew, carried me on his back. "Because," said he, "we want your help."

It turned out that they all intended to get about two hours' sleep on some old carriage robes which they spread on the floor, and at half-past eleven sharp I was to call them and then wait orders.

It was a lovely night, warm, dewy, starry, but so still! The villagers had gone to bed early to have a little repose before the inevitable cannonading begun—they always did at Bybury, for there was no sleep after midnight in that neighborhood till that set of boys had outgrown "celebrating." They seemed long hours to me, for, trusting to my known wakefulness, every boy of them had dropped off, and I sat curled up by a window with Tom's watch in my pocket, till the time slipped by.

Punctual to the moment I had them up; and after a whispered consultation they went out to try means of ingress, while I kept watch and was to signal if any one approached.

"It's no good to try, for the Commodore"—that was what they called him—"has been as good as his word. So now for it!" said Tom, at last, and pulling off his shoes and cap, he began to climb the lightning-rod.

If you do not know how the rods used to be put up on meeting-houses, you will not understand the foolhardiness of this proceeding. Instead of following the walls of the building—in which case the risk would have been fearful enough—the rod descended slanting in mid-air from the belfry, far out to the main building, so that for a long distance it was out in space, swaying at the least touch; then from the eaves it run down the side of the house, and then was supposed to be secured firmly in the ground. But this one had been broken off a yard or more at the bottom, so it was rather a shaky and uncertain thing at

the best, besides being constructed in pieces which were hooked together in a loose way. It was rough and rusty, and about as large round as a man's thumb. Such was the ladder by which Tom Milliken proposed to climb up to the high bell tower, on the dark side of the church, with no light to guide him except what came from the stars.



HAND OVER HAND, IN THE DARKNESS.

Tom Milliken was not afraid of anything ; but now, when the boys saw him slowly going up, hand over hand, in the darkness, they began to realize what a perilous feat it was, and begged in low voices :

"Tom ! Tom ! do come down ! Let's give it up !"

But Tom whispered back, "Stop your noise ! take

care of my cap and shoes, and stop your noise !"

Not a word was spoken after that. Almost breathless the boys watched from below, holding fast the end of the rod to steady it, while I crept out and secured the cap and shoes. Meanwhile Tom gained the eaves, where he rested a few minutes before beginning the most dangerous part of the ascent. Slowly moving up, we saw his dark form against the sky ; then we lost sight of him as he swung into the shadow ; but in a moment he appeared climbing over the balustrade into the belfry.

I am sure we all felt like shouting our joy, but we kept silent and listened. Presently we heard him cautiously raising the trap door ; then creaking down the narrow, shaky stairs, which had long been considered unsafe, but yet allowed to remain as they were ; then he was blundering through the dark gallery ; and at last he was fumbling at the hasp which secured the vestry door on the inside.

Then they all rushed in, and old "Prohibition Bell" was rung as it had never been rung before — "*Ding-dong, ding-dong,*" as fast as it could go, it sounded on the still midnight air, and was echoed back from the hills, rousing the whole village ; heads were popped out of windows along the street, and suppressed laughter was heard, for everybody knew how confident the Commodore had been.

The boys had rung it furiously for about ten minutes, and the little cannons had begun to speak on every corner, when from my watch-window I spied a lantern in the Commodore's door-yard. In another minute I had scattered the ringers ; and by the time he had appeared on the scene of action with the blacksmith, whom he had routed from his bed, there was not a boy visible, except the small fellows with their cannons on the nearest cross street, who were unable to tell him anything, simply because they did not know.

The culprits, however, were all within hearing, and lost not a word of the old gentleman's strong assertions, spoken loud on purpose for their ears, which he was shrewd enough to suppose were within hearing, that he would find out "who they are ; and I'll prosecute every one of them to the fullest extent of the law."

The two men searched everywhere, even to the belfry, from which their lantern shone like a beacon, and they tried every window and looked into every pew ; then, giving it up, the blacksmith put a padlock on the outer door, and they departed.

The boys gave them just time enough to get home ; then, at my sign, they started up from their hiding-places, and the bell began to toll, deep and strong and quick. Tom, who had planned for every possible contingency, had carried in his pocket, when he climbed up, a strong cord wound round a pebble to which one end was secured ; the other he had tied to the clapper of the bell ; then, unwinding, he had hurled the stone back down over the sheds ; and now they were using this strong cord with a will.

The bell had boomed furiously for a few minutes, when the lantern appeared again in the Commodore's yard, and back he came with his companion. They found the church all right — not a window unfast-

which they tried to break by their united efforts, and succeeded by sawing it along the edge of the roof.

And now the sexton was so sure that the bell would be at rest for the remainder of the night that he laughed at the blacksmith when he proposed that they should sit on the meeting-house steps with their lantern and watch till daybreak, which was not very far off. He dispersed the small boys, bidding them, "Go home and go to bed, and come again at sunrise, then *I* will ring the bell *myself* ; and *you* may all ring till your hands are blistered. As for those rascals," raising his voice, "if they have broken so much as a pane of glass in this house, I will have the law on them to-morrow !"

The boys had a pretty busy night of it, but they were not through yet. As soon as the familiar lantern had vanished in the Commodore's house, a window in the church was gently raised, a dark lantern in Tom's hand shone a moment, there was a good deal of climbing in and out, of low talking, and the sound of tools being used, and certain other sounds strongly suggesting that something was going on in the belfry. Then the boys dispersed just at daylight, agreeing to

keep watch and see what happened next.

Promptly at sunrise came the sexton, and a crowd of small boys at his heels ; a few men, too, had lounged along to the church steps, and looked in as he threw open the doors.

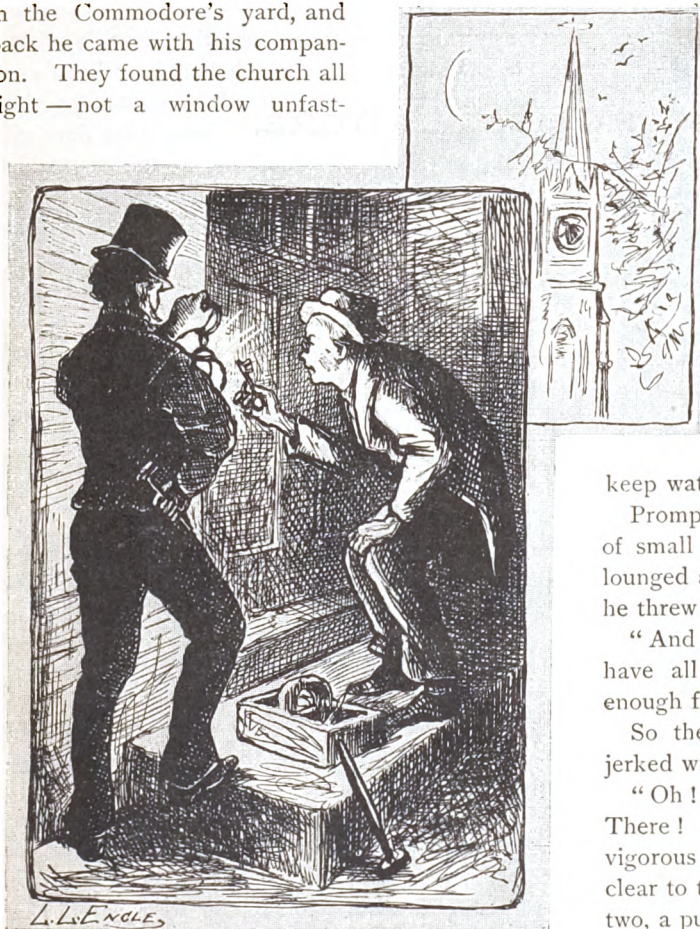
"And now," shouted the Commodore, "you may have all the ringing you want. This is early enough for all orderly folks !"

So the little fellows snatched at the rope, and jerked with all their might — with no result.

"Oh ! clear out !" said he, "and see *me* do it ! There ! *That's* the way to ring !" pulling with one vigorous sweep of his right arm, which drew the rope clear to the floor ; and so he kept on for a minute or two, a puzzled expression coming over his face ; then suddenly he called to the men outside. "Seems to me this bell don't ring, or else I have gone deaf all at once ! Hey ?"

"No," cried one of the small boys, "'tain't making no sound, Captain."

The Commodore pulled and tugged, then took off his coat and worked away till his face was in a blaze, and beads of perspiration rolled down his cheeks.



THE COMMODORE MAKES SURE.

ened, and every door secure ; so re-locking the outer ones, they proceeded to an inspection of the sheds. But while they were still in the vestibule, bending over the inner lock, Tom had slipped in and hidden himself in the wood closet. It did not require much searching on the part of the men to find the cord,

"Those young rascals!" he said. "They must have tied the clapper." Upon which, two men volunteered to go up and see. They soon returned with the intelligence that the clapper was "gone entirely." But the Commodore could not believe it, or was so obstinate that he *would* not till he had the evidence of his own eyes. Sure enough—gone it was.

Nor did it re-appear in its proper place till the next Saturday night. When the sexton went to ring for church on Sunday morning, there it was, as if

nothing had happened. Of course it made the talk of the town, and everybody thought that Byberry village had some rather remarkable boys. They were now given full permission to ring that bell as much as they wanted to at midnight before every coming Fourth of July as long as they lived; *but* because they *could* do it, they did not care to, and never did after that memorable occasion. And their secret has been kept all of these years—the boys are now men—and nobody knows to this day who took that clapper off and put it on again.

TWO YOUNG HOMESTEADERS.

BY MRS. THEODORA R. JENNESS.

CHAPTER XIV.

A PERILOUS PREDICAMENT.

"**H**OLD on fast and I will save you both!" Kearn called to Prairie, in answer to her mute self-sacrifice.

The dear, strong voice inspired her. She made another strenuous effort to turn Hiawatha toward the shore; but he had lost his head hopelessly, and persisted in his course with the current.

It was not long before she saw that he was growing tired, and that he swam more slowly. Her own endurance was tasked, for every plunge the pony made drenched her through and through. She tried to turn her head once more, that she might see if Kearn had rescued Rose; but in the attempt, she almost lost her balance in the saddle; and soon Hiawatha swam round a bend, cutting off the ford from view.

About midway between the banks, there was an island, shaped like an Indian mound and overgrown with trees. A gnarled and crooked branch stretched out above the water, and Hiawatha swam so near that Prairie was nearly swept from his back—but, instead, she carefully caught hold and let the pony slip from under her; then, exerting all her strength, drew herself up on to it, and crept along to where it joined the tree, and secured a seat against the trunk.

The ground was under water, so that she could not descend. But for the present she was safe. Her great fear now, was that Kearn and Rose had failed to reach the bank. She knew that Kearn was a good swimmer, but he was subject to cramp, so that it was never safe for him to go into the water.

Relieved of Prairie's weight, Hiawatha swam ashore a little further down the stream; and from the timber just around the bend, Wildfire and Kearn's horse were now whinnying to him so that Prairie knew all the horses were on land. She called, and called Kearn's name, and once she fancied she heard an answer, but as it was not repeated she found it must have been the wind among the trees. A feeling that Kearn and Rose had both been drowned forced itself upon her, and she wrung her hands and sobbed aloud.

But in a few moments, through her tears, Prairie saw some object moving towards her through the water. She could not tell at first, whether it was a wild animal, a dog, or a human being; but presently an arm was stretched up, and Whistler's head then rose above the water.

"Ugh! Sparkling Eyes roost high," he exclaimed.

"Oh, Whistler," she cried, "be quick and see if you can find them! It may be they are clinging to a snag, and haven't sunk the third time yet! Do leave me here and try to rescue them," she sobbed, looking down at him with an appealing face.